CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents 1) Research Background, 2) Limitation of The Study, 3) Problem Formulation, 4) Research Objectives, 5) Research Significance, and 6) Conceptual and Operational Definition.

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is completely perceived as a dynamic process in which its implementation and components face several changes as a development. It also happens to the education system in Indonesia, where a gradual change occurs in the national education system reflected in the national curriculum (Rachmawati et al., 2022). Kamal (2024) states that many educational components have been changed to meet national needs by implementing a new curriculum called *Kurikulum Merdeka*. A set of systematically plotted teaching and learning processes is designed through a new regulation of course objectives, approaches, methods, and learning strategies (Rahayu et al., 2022). The change of each learning component in the current curriculum is along with the demand of 21st-century learning (Asmarani et al., 2021). *Kurikulum Merdeka* is an innovative development conducted by the government to solve several educational cases or issues. The circumstance is continuously evaluated to meet the social needs and pedagogical paradigm as the dynamic process (Said et al., 2023).

Kurikulum Merdeka is an program providing freedom and accessibility for teachers and students to be more flexible and adaptive (Anisah & Qamariah,

2023; Pouw & Mulyanti, 2023). The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes character development and students' skills or competencies, which are bridged through complete direct exercises (Kharimah et al., 2023). Halim et al., (2024) state that *Kurikulum Merdeka* was published as an emergency curriculum to renew the Indonesian education system after COVID-19 by providing hybrid learning. It is added that *Kurikulum Merdeka* is progressively obtained to optimize its function to nurture students' 21st-century skills and enhance students' active participation in shaping their educational process (Barlian et al., 2022; Malikah et al., 2022; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). Therefore, this curriculum is perceived as flexible and demands teachers provide a learning process that emphasizes students' development and needs for the 21st century by allowing them to build and design their own learning process independently.

The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* attracts educational stakeholders and teachers, particularly in English foreign language (EFL). Nuranisa (2024) explain that implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* needs considerable attention in EFL classrooms since it broadly frames the English learning process. The English learning process concerns students' grammar and vocabulary mastery and is more focused on students' verbal and communication skills, including enhancing their critical thinking and other 21st-century skills (Simbolon, 2021). It is an issue related to new pedagogical approaches to enhance students' engagement, improve their 21st-century skills, and increase their English skills (Emawati et al., 2024). It is relevant to the current condition in which implementing an appropriate learning strategy to fulfill the demand of

Kurikulum Merdeka is still a problem for many EFL teachers (Abidin & Malisa, 2023). It is such an issue that it requires more concern from educational parties.

The researcher found a problem during the preliminary observation on November 2023, conducted at SMPN 3 Singaraja as one of the junior high schools implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English classrooms. English teachers face obstacles in teaching 9th-grade students, especially those with the lowest English scores on their final test. Another teacher also mentions that the challenge lies in selecting appropriate learning activities to engage students and improve their English skills. Many English teachers are still adapting the learning activities designed for the previous curriculum. It leads to a condition where an innovative learning activity is needed, particularly the activities underlined by *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Technology development brings many benefits to teachers, including the appearance of innovative teaching strategies. Project-based learning is one of the teaching models that emerged due to technological development and can be integrated into several learning activities (Arrasyid, 2023). It is argued that project-based learning is one of the suggested learning models mentioned in Kurikulum Merdeka, a constructivist learning method involving students in a meaningful learning process through a project (Simatupang & Yusuf, 2024). Authentic learning activities emphasized in project-based learning models to enhance students' critical thinking skills directly develop students' English proficiency through analyzing, reasoning, and playing the language input and output (Song et al., 2024). Its authenticity, along with the demand of Kurikulum

Merdeka, makes project-based learning the most frequent learning method suggested to be applied in English classrooms (Anisah & Qamariah, 2023).

Many researchers have discussed the implementation of project-based learning for *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English classrooms. Shofiyuddin et al. (2023) reveal that implementing project-based learning through *Kurikulum Merdeka* perceives positive responses from senior high school students in EFL classes. It is also found that the project-based learning models implemented with *Kurikulum Merdeka* improve vocational students' speaking skills (Nurohmah et al., 2024; Rahmawati & Kusumaningtyas, 2024). Those studies show that project-based learning is appropriate for English classrooms and the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

However, further study needs to be conducted on the relevant study that the problem found at SMPN 3 Singaraja, considering that the English proficiency of ninth-grade students is still low. Another issue is that there is still the use of learning activities designed by the previous curriculum in, which it is due to the teachers' difficulty in developing the new learning activities based on *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Some researchers conducted about the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning activities in classes for implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* showed PjBL can improve students activity and learning outcomes. Souisa et al. (2024) showed that applying the PjBL model in early childhood can emphasize the importance of proper stimulation in project-based learning. The development of project-based teaching materials for social education showed that PjBL supports improving 21st

century skills such as collaboration, communication, and creativity Prayogo et al. (2024). A study by Rahmawati et al. (2022) showed significant improvement in students' speaking and writing skills after completing a project on local cultural heritage. Students were motivated to use English to present their findings, enhancing fluency and confidence. Project-based learning activities require real-world tasks like creating presentations and conducting interviews. Furthermore, many activities can be used in English classes, but no one has made a book containing these project-based learning activities.

There is still a limited study the development of project-based learning activities to support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka since all the previous studies focus on investigating the effect of the learning models. Therefore, this study is conducted to develop a prototype of project-based learning activities for ninth-grade students English teachers could easily deploy. Hence, research and development were needed to prototype project-based learning activities for Curriculum Merdeka implementation. Thus, this study will contribute to developing project-based learning activities in the form of a prototype that focuses on English material for project-based learning methods using the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

1.2 Limitation of the Study

The transition from online to offline learning process in Junior High School which emphasizes the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* raises various issues, such as how students perceive and perform in English through projects. There are several problems occur, i.e.,

1. The research was conducted in junior high school Grade 9 of SMPN 3 Singaraja, in which the researcher employed ADDIE Model consisting of 5 phases. In this study, the phases were stopped in third phase (development phase).

2. The research was conducted to fill the research gap. Little existing literature investigating developing PjBL activities in junior high school that emphasize the use of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and Pancasila Students Profile.

This study was a part of a boarder research that took 2 years to finalize. The research was conducted to the development stage and resumed with expert judgment about the quality of the developed project. Other researchers will carry it out during the course of the following year, from implementation to the evaluation stages.

1.3   Research Question

Based on the research background, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the specifications of project-based learning activities that are needed for teaching English for Grade 9 students in SMPN 3 Singaraja to support the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*?

2. What is the prototype of project-based learning activities resulting from the development of its specifications based on the need analysis conducted?

3. What is the quality of the developed project-based learning activities for teaching English in SMPN 3 Singaraja?

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the research question, the study was conducted for several objectives as follows:

1. To describe the specifications of project-based learning activities that are needed in English Classes of Grade 9 of SMPN 3 Singaraja.

2. To describe the prototype of project-based learning activities that are developed for teaching English Grade 9 of SMPN 3 Singaraja to support the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

3. To measure the quality of the developed project-based learning activities for teaching English in SMPN 3 Singaraja.

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are two significances aimed in this study, theoretically and practically. The significance can be mentioned as follows:

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

These research findings are to develop the product related to developing PjBL activities as the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* for 9th-grade students. By examining the possible applications of PjBL to align with Kurikulum Merdeka's objective, this study seeks to contribute to enriching literature on innovative pedagogies and enriching activities development methods that enhance the quality of EFL learning at the junior high school level. Furthermore, this study

is expected to offer insight regarding understanding the application of Kurikulum Merdeka in English language teaching and how it can be aligned congruently with current pedagogical practices. It intends to enrich the development of activities that improve the quality of teachers' and students' pedagogies in the teaching and learning process by looking into the use of PjBL to support *Kurikulum Merdeka's* standard.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

1) For English Teachers

This study is expected to give a contribution of knowledge for English teachers. Thus, English teachers can adapt the teaching and learning activities suitable for teaching English subjects by following *Kurikulum Merdeka's* standard. Discovering the development of PJBL activities can help the teacher design an effective and innovative lesson plan for the students.

2) For Future Researchers

This study can be used for future researchers as an insight into the development of PjBL activities book in *Kurikulum Merdeka*. In the future, there can be more development research that could help teachers in developing PjBL activities in English in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

3) For Students

This study is expected to help students more assist in improving their English language proficiency and other skills that is necessary to be forced in 21st century learning. Using the teaching and learning activities that used can help the students

actively collaborate with their friends in the class and motivate and engage students in language learning activities.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Conceptual Definition

a. Project-Based Learning (PjBL)

PjBL model is frequently selected in terms of self-education. Project-based learning has become an effective tool for solving the issues of 21st-century learning because it incorporates the ideas of critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and creativity. Project-based learning is a successful model for fostering the development of 21st-century abilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, media literacy, cooperation, leadership, teamwork, innovation, and creativity (Kurnisar et al., 2023). Artini et al., (2018) showed the important of student-centered learning when 'authentic' materials and assessments were utilized in a project-based activity. Project-based learning is a teaching strategy involving students in planning, producing, and displaying solutions to practical issues (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). Long-term, multidisciplinary, and student-centered learning activities are prioritized in project-based learning. It is a pedagogical approach that gives students more focus. In classroom that used project-based learning activities, students ask questions and attempt to find answers by researching while supervised and guided by the teacher (Somjai & Soontornwipast, 2020). Project-based learning is helpful as it is related to real-world problems and motivates students to apply their knowledge. Project-based learning emphasizes the student-centered learning

model. The teacher acts as a facilitator and motivator while students learn independently (Halimatusyadiyah et al., 2022). Project-based learning emphasizes students getting involved in projects that encourage collaboration. In PjBL activities, the activities arranged and organized based on real world tasks have brought new challenges for students to solve or create something. The activities are based on the learning guide or syllabus that already designed for teachers, coaches, school leaders, and students.

b. *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Kurikulum Merdeka is one of the newest educational programs in Indonesia. The curriculum is described as instructions contained in a written document that results from collaborative instructions and includes formulations of objectives, learning activities teaching materials, schedules, and evaluations (Sukirman, et al., 2021). Curriculum can also be understood as the information contained in a program's specific subjects or as data and information used to guide students through the necessary record papers and lesson plans (Julaeha, 2019) as cited in (Ndari et al., 2023). *Kurikulum Merdeka* is interpreted as a learning design that allows students to learn in different situations, like calm, relaxed, and enjoyable, to show their natural talents Fauzi (2022). According to Susetyo (2020), the curriculum is a collection of plans and arrangements that include learning resources, objectives, content, and learning materials as well as ways that will be used as guidelines in organizing activities learning to achieve the goals of education. With *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the students can develop their potential and abilities, providing them with critical and high-quality learning

(Fauzi, 2022). The curriculum as the main tool to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, has always been a novelty. The concept of *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes on *Merdeka Belajar*.

c. Learning Activities

Learning Activities are needed for the teacher to support the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* by using project-based learning. According to Somjai and Soontornwipast (2020) learning activities are tasks or assignments that students complete under the direction of their teacher. These are activities for students. Learning activities are very important in the learning process (Ningsih et al., 2017) because they help students gain knowledge, develop skills, change their attitudes and behaviour, and grow their personalities. According to Susanti & Trisusana (2018), the enhancement of learning materials that consider students' needs and characteristics of learning goals that foster innovation and creativity refers to the development of learning activities. In the framework of project-based learning, learning activities call for producing extracurricular materials or resources to help the students while they are studying. It covers the methods of instruction and the development of the activities that will be utilized to help students improve their English proficiency. As cited in (Astawa et al., 2017), learners develop their learning by being attached to several activities following their talents, interests, and physical and psychological development. Development activities can provide real-world instruction based on project-based learning involvement to engage students in a project.

1.6.2 Operational Definition

a. Project-based Learning

In this study, project-based learning is learning models in English classes in junior high school to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka*. It uses ADDIE Model as a guideline for creating prototypes that are used as learning tools. Any textbook or document used in the classroom is also analysed, focusing on the sections that deal with project-based learning activities, steps, and content. The prototype of the project-based learning activities be created based on the instrument's need analysis findings. Each book has six units. Each unit has title, learning objectives, pre-communicative activities, driving question, project plan, project timeline, project assessment, and project evaluation. Hence, the prototype was designed and planned to adhere to the needs of the targeted school, SMPN 3 Singaraja.

b. *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Kurikulum Merdeka is an educational document in Indonesian. It emphasizes teachers and students' independence and flexibility to explore their potential creatively and innovative. The teachers can give the learning activities based on the needs and abilities of the students. This study will discover the *Kurikulum Merdeka* used in the school based on the document analysis (textbook) and the participant. The analysis of *Kurikulum Merdeka* used is needed to ensure that the school has already implemented *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Grade 9.

c. Learning Activities

The learning activities are activities for the students that use project-based learning. There are some activities for the students based on the book that the researcher made. Six activities are in six units; every unit has one activity project. The learning activities should improve students' knowledge, skills, and competencies. The learning activities can be brought into the real-world using strategy project-based learning. Activities are tasks for students by use project-based learning.